

## Understanding And Wisdom

### Wisdom and Righteousness are Fruits of a Process

John W. Ritenbaugh

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Six or eight months ago, I gave a sermon that involved Solomon and wisdom. Now, shortly after giving that, I prepared another, a sequel to that one, but for some unknown reason, never gave it.

In that first one I showed you that Solomon did not literally ask for wisdom. Rather he asked for understanding, or perhaps discernment, that he more might more correctly judge Israel. I also mentioned in that sermon that God did not respond to Solomon's request by miraculously pouring wisdom into Solomon's mind. Rather, Solomon's instruction to us in Proverbs is gleaned from his experiences.

What God did do was facilitate wisdom's accumulation, its development in Solomon's mind as He made him work for it. Now the result of what he requested though was indeed wisdom.

Now, Solomon shows that there is a fairly clear progression of steps that produce wisdom in anyone's mind desiring to follow those steps. One, is gathering information or knowledge. The second step is meditation, that is, experience and seeking counsel providing discernment, and third, the fruit is the practical application, which is wisdom in the biblical sense.

I want you to turn to Proverbs 1, verses 1 through 6, and as soon as I get my Bible, which I left at my seat, I will turn to it as well. You do not want to be a preacher without any ammunition in your gun.

**Proverbs 1:1-6** The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion—a wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to

understand the proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles.

I am beginning here because I want us to first have some basic definitions because Solomon does not always use the same Hebrew words that may be translated into a common English word and that may somewhat mislead us away from the specific information that is contained there. For example, in verse 2, the word translated wisdom literally means "skill in living" in Hebrew. In verse 3, the word translated wisdom literally means "wise behavior" in Hebrew, providing a subtle difference. Now the first word, the one in verse 2, is more general. The second is more specific to a given circumstance. Also in verse 2, the word that is translated understanding means in English, "having the capability to distinguish." In other words, discernment.

Going ahead to verse 4, the English word for the Hebrew word translated subtlety (KJV) is better rendered into English as prudence or carefulness. Again, in verse 4, the English word appearing there is discretion. Now, today, discretion indicates being circumspect, cautious, and responsible. But the underlying Hebrew thought is more accurately translated into the English "shrewdness" or "a practical cleverness." Not negative in any way. It is just being clever.

Now the best English word is one that is not used very frequently anymore. It is perspicacious, which indicates an unusual ability to see through or to understand what is puzzling to most. It is a more specific form of discernment. In other words, you just cut right through all the riffraff that is there and you get right to the heart of somebody, something.

What I am getting at here is that there is much more than meets the eye of just a casual glance of what one may read through just very hurriedly. So it is always very helpful to have a dictionary or *Strong's Concordance* and perhaps even a modern translation on hand because they will add immeasurably to one's grasp of the content.

Now after Solomon laid that brief purpose statement in verses 1 through 6, the remainder of the chapter essentially shows in broad strokes why right knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are necessary. In one sense, it is

simple. It is to keep us from falling into the wrong crowd, to keep us from being trapped by wrong desires. So if we can discern, understand where a circumstance is headed, we can get out of there.

Now Proverbs is intensely practical, giving sound advice for developing personal qualities necessary to achieve success in life. And it, unlike most other biblical books, does not focus attention on Israel as a nation, but on the individual, anyone who might want to be successful in life if they will just believe what it says. So it is not a writing one would even normally consider to be a religious work. However, it is solidly based in deep respect for God by stating right in the introduction that the fear of the Lord is the foundation for real success in life. That is in verse 7.

The proverbs clearly teach respect for authority and traditional values of God thoroughly illustrated in much more detail in other parts of the Bible.

Let us go to Proverbs 4, verse 7. It says there that,

**Proverbs 4:7** Wisdom is the principal thing [principal meaning main thing. That is, main within the context of the book]; therefore get wisdom. And with all your getting, get understanding.

So there are the two are linked. The New International Version translates this verse this way:

**Proverbs 4:7** (NIV) Wisdom is supreme. Therefore, get wisdom, though it costs you all you have, get understanding.

Now it could easily be translated in this way. Remember the definition: "Skill in living is supreme. Therefore, get skill in living, though it costs you all you have to get the capability to distinguish."

Overall, this command is saying that wisdom is so important that we should give our all for it, so important that no price is too high or sacrifice so great to obtain it.

Now why does this verse not say righteousness rather than wisdom and understanding? That would seem to come pretty high, would it not, being

righteous. Well, I believe it is because understanding and wisdom normally precede righteousness. In other words, it takes something to produce righteousness. And those three things are knowledge, understanding, wisdom, leads to the fruit, righteousness.

What we are seeing then is another step in the Proverbs success formula for life. And even as knowledge and understanding precede wisdom, so do all three precede righteousness.

Now, why? Because in terms of behavior, wisdom is in reality simply the matter of making the right choices at the right time for the right reasons. That is real skill in living. The entire purpose of wisdom within the context of Proverbs is to make the right choices so that success is achieved. Wisdom and right choices are so closely related that one can say wisdom is making right choices or right choices are wisdom. Just turn them about.

Let us go to Proverbs 2, verses 1 through 5. Further instruction from Solomon.

**Proverbs 2:1-5** My son, if you will receive my words, and treasure my commandments within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then shall you understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

The first four verses is a statement on the degree of commitment required to attain wisdom. And the fifth verse contains an interesting and I think delightful surprise in light of the number of times that I have mentioned seeking God in the last several months. That pleasant surprise in verse 5 is that verse 5 is essentially saying that if one will diligently search for wisdom, he will be rewarded with knowing God. Now the knowledge of God, this kind of knowledge of God is not mere intellectual opinion but knowing God as Jesus stated in John 17:3, and that knowing God is eternal life.

Now the first four verses are telling us that this will not be easy. Why? Because each and every one of us is going to have to fight our way past all of the diversions and distractions that our nature, the world, and Satan throws

against us. And here is that warfare again. The New English Bible translates verse 1 as,

**Proverbs 2:1** (NEB) My son, if you take my words to heart and treasure my commandments deep within you.

This draws our attention to the attitude towards successfully achieving knowledge, understanding, and wisdom that one must have toward finding these things. And that is, that they are an exceedingly valuable commodity one must have, a treasure one can draw upon and live by for the rest of one's life.

In verse 2, the New English Bible states,

**Proverbs 2:2** (NEB) Giving your attention to wisdom and your mind to understanding.

It is saying that achieving these cannot be a passing fancy. It requires diligent, time-consuming effort to absorb it.

Verse 3 from the New English Bible says,

**Proverbs 2:3** (NEB) If you cry out for discernment and invoke understanding.

Now the first phrase indicates that the seeker is always open to accepting them. He openly invites them to be part of him. He does not resist them. The second phrase amplifies the first as being more intense for seeking. It is almost as if Solomon is saying you have to plead and beg for them.

Then in verse 4, it amplifies the determination required even more because the New English Bible says,

**Proverbs 2:4** (NEB) If you seek her as for silver and dig for her as for buried treasure.

Now this word picture is drawn from the mining of silver ore. Silver ore is not found on the earth's surface lying there to be merely picked up. It requires diligent exertion to obtain.

There is one other thing of interest in verse 4 that adds to the imperative of the instruction to seek diligently. That is, that wisdom begins to be identified as a female. Remember, Proverbs is written to a male. Chapter 3 and verse 15 says she is more precious than rubies. It means wisdom is more precious than rubies, and all the things you can desire is not to be compared to her. If we would look to chapter 8 in Proverbs, we would find the entire chapter is devoted to wisdom as a she. If we would go to chapter 7, we would find that the harlot is also identified as a she.

And what Solomon is saying is that a man will *pursue* after a woman. But which is he going to choose, the harlot or the wisdom of God? The son of God must, and I emphasize *must*, make a serious choice and pursue after wisdom as if he was pursuing a wife to become one with for a lifetime of time spent together. So the son of God must choose.

As we conclude this sermonette, we can understand that pleasing God does not just automatically happen. It is *made* to happen through a combination of factors.

1. One must have a vision of an objective one holds to be a treasure of great value.
2. A strong, clear, unwavering sense of responsibility for attaining it must also be made.
3. These two, combined with determined, sustained, and diligent commitment to seeking it will achieve it.